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INFORMATION REPORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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COUNTRY Czechoslovakia

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SUBJECT Sverma's Iron Factory at Podbrezova

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1. Sverma's Iron Works is the latest official name for this national enterprise at Podbrezova (Q49/D06). Previous names were Zelezarny Podbrezova (Iron Works at Podbrezova) and Stredoslovenske Zelezarny (Central Slovakian Iron Works).

2. This enterprise is a small iron works to which a foundry was added and enlarged, particularly during the war, to include the production of the following: structural steel for bridges, machine tools for the processing of wood, agricultural machinery, gasoline barrels, shell casings, riveted and welded products, iron goods, and gun-stocks for the German navy.

3. The management of the plant at Podbrezova also controls the operations of plants in the following cities: Piesok (P49/T02), Hronec (Q49/D06), Brezno (Q49/D16), Tisovce (Q49/D34), Chvatiny (believed to be Chvatimech (Q49/D06), in addition to a small plant for the electrolysis of copper at Banska Bystrica (Q49/C76). Until 1949, factories in Bohemia and Moravia producing wood-working machines were also managed from Podbrezova.

4. The plant at Podbrezova employs 1600 workers. The buildings and equipment are antiquated. During the years 1918 to 1938 the factory was state-owned and operated at an average loss of thirty million crowns a year. At times it was more economical to shut down the plant and pay the workers their minimum wage. The reconstruction of the steel works was begun during the war. A gas generator was added and a small scrap pile (srotove pole) was started. During the Two Year Plan (1947 - 1948), reconstruction of the Martin furnaces was begun.

5. At present there are four Martin furnaces, one of which is always held in reserve or is being repaired. Each furnace has the capacity for a forty metric ton charge, and each charge lasts five to seven hours. On the basis of this, the rated capacity of the Podbrezova plant is 140,000 tons of steel per year. However, the actual capacity may be said to be 120,000 tons per year. Present steel output is 85,000 tons. The plant is known for careful planning and its ability to complete its yearly production quota in spite of low worker efficiency.

6. In the Podbrezova plant the raw steel was formerly cast into 350 mm x 400 mm ingots for rolling on a rough mill (hrube trati) into raw-rolled pieces (predvalky, cagle). However, a new method has been successful whereby the steel is cast into ingots 90 to 100 millimeters thick which

can be processed directly on the fine mill into steel rods for reinforcing concrete) and pipe, thus eliminating the rough mill step.* By eliminating the rough mill which was installed in 1852) and the twenty-five men necessary to operate it, the plant was able to save approximately 25 million crowns per year. The rolling mill used to produce steel rods was built in 1930 by the Vitkovice Iron Works (P50/058) and has a capacity of 70,000 tons. Rods for reinforcing concrete are made by twisting two rods together thus forming a spiral with a large pitch. These, however, are not as good as the American-made rods. The universal rolling mill for producing steel plates can roll sheets to a minimum thickness of three to four millimeters. The shears attached to this mill are in good condition. Smaller medium mills for making particular profiles and I-beams are being installed but are not yet in use. The pipe shop has a single Manesman mill (Manesmanova trat) which is about 40 years old and very inefficient. This mill is capable of producing pipe of 90 to 100 mm diameter which is later drawn to pipe of smaller dimensions. The pipe shop has a capacity of about 15,000 tons, but is now producing only 12,000 tons per year.

7. If the Podbrezova steel plant were operating at its capacity, the plant could produce 12,000 - 15,000 tons of pipe, 45,000 tons of sheet steel, and 60,000 tons of rods. Although there is a magnetic crane and a press for the handling of scrap, the equipment used in charging the Martin furnaces is primitive and slows down their operation. Since the blast furnace is 40 kilometers from the plant, the iron cannot be charged in the liquid state. The pipe shop is to be reconstructed, and a new Manesman mill with a capacity of 25,000 - 30,000 tons has been ordered from Vitkovice. Delivery is expected in 1953.

8. The section of the Podbrezova plant which produces tools is in very poor condition. There are about forty machines, all of very old construction. The plant laboratory is also poorly equipped and is used only to analyze finished steel. On the other hand, the steel produced at Podbrezova is usually of good quality because of long experience of the workers and because of the high manganese content of the ore from Zeleznik (249/544).

9. Although the Podbrezova plant represents only 5 - 6 percent of the total Czech steel capacity, its military importance is relatively great because of its location so far to the east. The plant itself is well hidden in the narrow Hron River valley which is foggy a good part of the year.

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* [redacted] comment: This method is not usual in steel technology, but is good for small steel plants.